

Designing with Children

Building Blocks

The Building Blocks Berlin project was developed by Färgfabriken/Medium following the success of its two predecessors: the first in Stockholm in 2010, and the second in Oslo in 2011. The participating children and young people were selected from diverse primary and secondary schools in Berlin and formed five groups comprising 3-8 members, each with an age range of 6-16 years old. In this case, we are following the work of three students, aged 15-16 years old, who are part of the group '12 Veränderer', co-initiated by Berlin-based architects Adam Page and Eva Hertzsch. A key goal of the project was to engage children and young people in the design of the exhibition pavilion, who took on a client role and commissioned architects for the design. Architects Nils Ruf, Max Graap and Marius Busch, members of Susanne Hoffman's group die Baupiloten, worked with the youngsters in the design process.

Motivation

The key driver for initiating the project was educational and concerned raising general awareness about different features and qualities of space and the environment. The project also aimed to enhance the participating children's and young people's capacity-building and sense of achievement within a collaborative spatial design framework.

Children's involvement

A selected architecture studio was assigned to each of the five groups of the young participants. Their task was to create a temporary wooden exhibition pavilion, named the 'Building Block', no bigger than 4m x 4m x 4m. Other than this requirement, the groups had complete freedom to decide on the function of the pavilion and design it.

Building Blocks project comprised two key phases. The first phase included the working teams having to complete the pavilion structure within 8 weeks at the Swedish Embassy. Later on, they were instructed to reconfigure and apply the same structure at their schools

What

Multifunctional seating spaces

Where

Berlin, Germany

Age

15-16 (age range in the whole Building Blocks project: 6 to 16 years old)

Group Size

3

Project Stage

Brief, Concept, Design Development

Children's Roles

(Co) Designers, Advocates for Change, Clients, Placemakers, Trailblazers

Timescale

September 2012 - November 2012

Partners

Susanne Hofmann (Architect)
Nils Ruf (Architect)
Max Graap (Architect)
Marius Busch (Architect)
Adam Page (Architect)
Eva Hertzsch (Architect)
Färgfabriken/Medium (Initiator)
The Swedish Embassy (Client)
3 students from Albert-Schweitzer School in Berlin-Neukölln (Participants)

as part of the second phase.

Three workshops took place: a model-making workshop; an atmosphere defining workshop; and, finally, a design workshop. In this context, the facilitating architects used various methods to engage the young people in the design process. Die Baupiloten team, for example, worked with three teenage girls and created collages and models, which expressed their wishes and vision of their dream house, and fed directly into the creation of the exhibition pavilion.

The architects held meetings and discussions with the participating students throughout, in the effort to establish a transparent working atmosphere. To this end, an on-site office was installed at the schools, which helped to maintain ongoing communication with the school communities.

The handmade models, collages and drawings were presented to the architects by class representatives, so that the ideas of the entire class could be included in the design process. All this work then informed the construction of a life-size prototype to test the final design.

Outputs and outcomes

The pavilion created at the Nordic Embassies exhibition space as a result of the above efforts offered multi-use spaces for seating: some more private, such as the lounge, and some public, such as the sun-deck. It was exhibited for 8 weeks. This structure was then reconfigured and reconstructed in order to enliven students' school spaces. Presentations were made both at the exhibition event and at the schools for the whole school community, including school staff, students and local residents.

The participating students were reported to have gained a good understanding of the changes needed for their schools. Their active engagement and substantial influence on the final structure was much valued by them, as the 16 year-old Edona explained: *'I really enjoyed that we were given the opportunity to realise our own ideas.'*

Resources

Personal communication with Susanne Hofmann (25 April 2013).

Müller, A. K. and Uttke, A. (2012?) Monologe, Dialoge, Stimmengewirr: Ein forschender Blick auf Kinder und Jugendliche als Bauherren.

Susanne Hofmann & die baupiloten Architekten. Building Blocks Berlin.
www.baupiloten.com/projekte/building-blocks/ (accessed 7 June 2013).





*Felleshus opening (the Nordic Embassies in Berlin).
Courtesy: Susanne Hofmann*



*Workshop 2: Making collages to the theme 'atmosphere of the space'.
Courtesy: Susanne Hofmann*



*Felleshus opening (the Nordic Embassies in Berlin).
Courtesy: Susanne Hofmann*



*Workshop 1: Exploring and discussing the strengths and weaknesses.
Courtesy: Susanne Hofmann; Sagano Nishigori (Photographer)*